



A Brief History of San Jose

Prehistoric and Spanish Periods

The first inhabitants of the coastal area from San Francisco to Monterey were the Ohlones or Costanoan Native American language group. Of this group, the Tamien occupied the banks of the Guadalupe and Coyote Rivers.

Spanish exploration and colonization marked the end of the Ohlone period. Due to the existence of a Russian settlement to the north at Fort Ross and the English and American explorations, Spain began colonizing California.

Spanish settlement started in 1769. In 1777 Mission Santa Clara was established on the west bank of the Guadalupe River. El Pueblo de San Jose was located on the east bank of the Guadalupe River on November 29, 1777. The Guadalupe River became the boundary between lands controlled by the mission and the pueblo. The pueblo at San Jose was the first civil settlement established by the Spanish in California. Its primary function was to supplement the crops grown by the missions to support the garrisons at Monterey and San Francisco.

Due to severe winter flooding, the site of the pueblo was moved about one mile to higher ground and the final site was in present day downtown. Early colonists planted crops of corn, beans, wheat, hemp and flax and set out small vineyards and orchards.

The Mexican Period

Governmental control changed from Spain to Mexico in 1822. Thirty-eight land grants were issued between 1833 and 1845 in the Santa Clara Valley, with all or parts of fifteen rancho grants located within San Jose's current city limits. When granted rancho land, a citizen was required to occupy the property and build a dwelling within a certain period of time. The California ranchero and his vaqueros spent a great deal of their time on horseback overseeing the immense acreage of cattle.

With relaxation of immigration regulations came foreign visitors and those who settled in San Jose. The first foreign settler was Antonio Sunol, a native of Spain. He was the first post-master in 1826, and in the 1830's he was chosen to be the attorney and registrar for the pueblo.

Approximately 700 people lived in the pueblo in 1835 of which 40 were foreigners, mostly Americans and Englishmen. The first overland migration arrived in California in 1841 and by 1845 there were 200 new American settlers added. As the Americans settled they changed the character of the pueblo from a Mexican village to a bustling American town with many new small scale commercial operations. As the Anglo-American population increased during the 1840's, the native Californians found themselves suddenly in the minority and their way of life seriously threatened.

The Early American Period

In May 1846 the United States declared war on Mexico and shortly thereafter the Americans raised the flag in Monterey and San Jose. In 1848, the United States acquired the Mexican province of California in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The discovery of gold in the Sierra foothills created a sudden influx of immigrants. This event enabled California statehood, achieved in 1850, while San Jose served as the first State capital.

A survey of the pueblo was commissioned by the junta, a ruling body of twelve men-six Californians and six Americans. This early plan determined transportation patterns within the town and influenced the development of business and residential patterns.

After the gold rush many settled in the cities and fertile range lands. Until the 1864 drought, stock raising continued to be the primary activity. Subsequently other emerging industries were sheep raising, dairy and wheat and hay production.

The combination of migrating miners and the arrival of legislators, newsmen and interested onlookers spurred the rapid development of San Jose. Urban development moved at a swift pace during the 1860's. Gas service was introduced in 1861 and gas mains were extended from San Jose to Santa Clara. San Jose Water Company was incorporated in 1866. The first sewers were contracted by the city this same year. During the 1850's, regional stage lines were established between San Jose, Santa Clara and Saratoga. These were replaced by the street car line, chartered by Samuel Bishop in 1868, which established the first urban transit lines in San Jose.

The need for a railroad was recognized in the early 1850's; however the railroad line between San Francisco and San Jose was not completed until 1864. This event was followed a few years later with the completion of the Central Pacific line from San Jose to Niles connecting San Jose with the transcontinental railroad in 1869.

Even though the State capital was moved from San Jose in 1852, the city continued to grow. San Jose became a major service center for the expanding agricultural lands nearby.

Horticultural Expansion

The California mission fathers recognized the horticultural potential of the Santa Clara Valley by establishing small orchards and vineyards. Orchards expanded into other areas of San Jose and nearby communities. Orchard products dominated agricultural production by the end of the century and fruit production peaked in the 1920's. By the 1930's, 83 percent of the valley orchardists raised prunes. At this time Santa Clara Valley was producing 25 percent of the world's trade.

The fruit canning and packing industry quickly grew to become the urban counterpart to the valley's orchards. The fruit industry came to dominate the lives and livelihoods of most residents in both city and county by the advent of the twentieth century. Early industrial development located near shipping and transportation lines.

Commercial growth boomed during the 1880's as well as expansion of urban services. Downtown development included a new city hall in 1889 as well as new commercial and business blocks

developed by businessman T. S. Montgomery. Electrical service came to San Jose in 1881. The electrical light tower at Market and Santa Clara Streets brought San Jose worldwide fame.

San Jose was a city of firsts. Besides the establishment of the first civil settlement and first State capital, other firsts include:

- the first automobile factory in California was established in San Jose after 1900;
- Clarence Letcher opened the first “garage” in the west in 1900 and the first service station in 1902;
- the first motor bus line in the State was started at Mt. Hamilton in 1910;
- John Montgomery, a professor at the University of Santa Clara flew the first heavier-than-air glider in 1893; and
- Dr. Charles Herrold pioneered California’s first radio transmission in 1894.

Subdivision and home production continued in the 1880’s. The first annexations were Gardiner and East San Jose which were both annexed in 1911.

Inter-War Period

Three major projects, initiated in 1929, spurred growth. These were: the development of the water conservation program, the connection of the Bayshore Freeway between San Jose and San Francisco, and the establishment of Moffett Field as a Navy dirigible base.

Homes continued to replace orchards as the City filled out.

Autos became more heavily used and the street car lines were abandoned during the 1920’s and 30’s and were replaced by private bus lines.

Frederick Terman was an engineering professor at Stanford University in 1930. Under Dr. Terman’s guidance Stanford University became a pioneer in the electronics industry.

Industrialization and Urbanization

Since the San Francisco Bay Area was the gateway to the Pacific theater from 1941 to 1945, during America’s involvement in World War II, thousands of military personnel visited and decided to return to the Bay Area.

William Hewlett and David Packard were students of Professor Terman at Stanford. Hewlett and Packard developed electronic test equipment in Palo Alto in their garage in 1939. This small company continued to grow in the post war period. In 1954, Stanford Industrial Park was established and attracted companies such as Hewlett-Packard, Varian Brothers (also students of Terman) as well as Sylvania, Philco-Ford, General Electric and Lockheed’s research laboratory. These Santa Clara Valley companies became the nucleus of what became known as Silicon Valley.

After World War II the business community launched an active campaign to attract businesses while the area experienced a population boom. International Business Machines moved in by 1953 and a General Electric plant was established in the early 1950’s. The personal computer industry developed in the 1970’s. By the 1960’s, the county’s economic base was dependent on the electronic and defense industries. Between 1950 and 1975, the population increased from 95,000 to

500,000 and the size of the City increased from 17 square miles in 1950 to over 120 square miles in 1970. This growth was spearheaded by City Manager Dutch Hamann who was appointed in 1950 by a pro-growth City Council. Under Hamann's pro-annexation policy, San Jose had annexed 1,419 outlying acres by the end of 1969 when Hamann left his position. During this period residential subdivisions replaced orchards with amazing speed. The increasing popularity, usage and availability of cars enabled this pro-growth policy.

The City continued to expand out along the commercial corridors. The commercial migration started in 1956 when the first store at Valley Fair, San Jose's first regional shopping center opened up. Up until this time, the San Jose City Council maintained a policy that no commercial zoning would be granted out of the downtown core area. The downtown core began a decline in the 50's which continued until successful redevelopment efforts occurred in the 1980's and beyond to present day.

Source: Historical Overview and Context for the City of San Jose
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